

Message Text

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

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E. O. 11652: N/ A

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SUBJECT: NEWS ARTICLE ON LAOS MIA' S

REF: VIENTIANE 3628

FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF ARBUCKLE REPORT IN WASH. STAR

MAY 15: BEGIN TEXT.

VIENTIANE-- LATEST AMERICAN EFFORTS TO GAIN INFORMATION
ON OVER 300 AMERICANS MISSING IN LAOS HAVE FAILED BECAUSE
OF PATHET LAO COMMUNIST REFUSAL TO COOPERATE WITH THE
UNITED STATES ON THE PROBLEM, A US EMBASSY SPOKESMAN SAID
HERE TODAY.

THE SPOKESMAN SAID THESE NEW AMERICAN EFFORTS HAVE BEEN
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" STONEWALLED BY THE PATHET LAO."

" WE ARE SIMPLY TRYING TO GET WORD ON WHAT HAPPENED TO THESE MEN FOR THEIR WIVES AND RELATIONS... A HUMANITARIAN THING," HE SAID.

" THE PATHET LAO SAY THEY ARE TRANSMITTING OUR REQUESTS TO SAM NEUA (THE PATHET LAO HEADQUARTERS IN NORTHEAST LAOS) BUT WE HAVE NEVER HAD ANY REPLIES."

REVEALING THESE LATEST AMERICAN EFFORTS TO LEARN THE FATE OF US MISSING IN LAOS FOR FIRST TIME, THE SOURCES SAID MEETINGS WERE HELD BETWEEN THE SENIOR AMERICAN HERE, CHARGE D' AFFAIRES JOHN GUNTER DEAN, AND THE NO. 2 MAN IN THE PATHET LAO HIERARCHY, PHOUMI VONGVICHIT, HERE IN VIENTIANE OVER A PERIOD OF " SEVERAL WEEKS."

EARLIER NEGOTIATIONS HAD BEEN BETWEEN LOWER RANKING PATHET LAO REPRESENTATIVE HERE, SOT PETRASY, AND THE US CONSUL WHO HANDLES PRISONER AFFAIRS, RICHARD RAND. THESE CONTACTS WERE FRUITLESS.

REFLECTING THE PATHET LAO UNWILLINGNESS TO GIVE INFORMATION, PHOUMI VONGVICHIT REPORTEDLY TOLD DEAN HE COULD NOT GIVE AUTHORIZATION FOR US VISITS TO PATHET LAO AREAS OF LAOS TO DETERMINE THE MISSING MEN' S FATE.

PHOUMI REPORTEDLY SAID " THE AMERICANS BOTHER OTHER PEOPLE FOR THE DEAD MORE THAN FOR THE LIVING... ONE MUST RATHER THINK OF THE LIVING LAO WHO HAVE NOT ARRIVED AT AN UNDERSTANDING YET."

THESE REMARKS WERE MADE IN THE LAO LANGUAGE AND US OFFICIALS ARE UNWILLING TO SPECULATE ON WHETHER PHOUMI IS CLAIMING THE MISSING MEN ARE DEAD OR IF HE IS CALLING FOR A LAO SETTLEMENT BEFORE GIVING UP ANY US PRISONERS STILL ALIVEHERE.

THERE HAS BEEN NO PRISONER EXCHANGE IN LAOS APART FROM NINE AMERICANS HANDED OVER AT THE TIME OF THE VIETNAM UNCLASSIFIED

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EXCHANGES. ALTHOUGH THERE HAS BEEN A RELATIVELY SUCCESSFUL CEASEFIRE THERE HAS NOT BEEN ANY POLITICAL SETTLEMENT.

NORTH VIETNAMESE TOTALING 148 AND AN UNKNOWN NUMBER OF PATHET LAO ARE STILL HELD PRISONER HERE IN VIENTIANE.

SEVERAL THOUSAND PATHET LAO WERE FREED BY THE LAO GOVERNMENT OVER THE WAR YEARS AFTER PLEDGING TO FIGHT ON THE GOVERNMENT SIDE.

THE COMMUNISTS HOLD AN ESTIMATED 700 THAIS PRISONER AND AT LEAST 2,000 LAO MILITARY.

AN EXCHANGE OF PRISONERS IS UNLIKELY UNTIL A LAOS POLITICAL SETTLEMENT COMES AND THIS IS PRESENTLY REGARDED BY DIPLOMATS AS BEING A LONG WAY OFF. IT AWAITS A SOLUTION OF CAMBODIA AND VIETNAM PROBLEMS AS WELL AS LAO DIFFERENCES INCLUDING PATHET LAO PROPOSALS TOTALLY ABHORRENT

TO THE LAOS GOVERNMENT AIMED AT DIVIDING LAOS INTO THE ZONES.

REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION WERE BASED ON THE PARIS NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN HENRY KISSINGER AND LE DUC THO WHEREBY NORTH VIETNAM AGREED TO ACCOUNT FOR ALL AMERICANS MISSING IN INDOCHINA.

" WE WERE VERY GLAD TO RECEIVE THE NINE AMERICANS WE GOT BACK," AN EMBASSY SPOKESMAN SAID.

HE NOTED NORTH VIETNAM HAD OVER THE WEEKEND ALLOWED VISITS TO VIETNAM GRAVE SITES.

THERE HAVE BEEN MEETINGS BETWEEN US OFFICIALS AND NORTH VIETNAMESE HERE ON THE PRISONER QUESTION TOO BUT THE US APPARENTLY HOPES THE PARTIAL SUCCESS OF THE FOUR- PARTY COMMISSION IN SOUTH VIETNAM IN GETTING SOME COOPERATION FROM HANOI MIGHT BE CONTINUED IN LAOS AND DOES NOT WANT TO CONFUSE THE ISSUE BY MAKING STRONG REPRESENTATION TO THE HANOI EMBASSY HERE.

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ALSO THE WILD TERRAIN AND ALMOST TOTAL LACK OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS IS GOING TO MAKE A SEARCH FOR THE MISSING EVEN MORE DIFFICULT THAN IN VIETNAM.

HIGHEST ESTIMATES OF US PRISONERS STILL ALIVE IS BETWEEN 50 AND 60.

SPECIAL REPRESENTATION HAS BEEN MADE TO THE COMMUNISTS CONCERNING FOUR MEN, ALL CASES WHERE THERE IS CLEAR EVIDENCE THEY WERE ALIVE LONG AFTER CAPTURE.
END TEXT. RUSH

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